

The windhover and the oven bird essay



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The sonnet, “ The Windhover” by Gerard Manley Hopkins and the sonnet, “ The Oven Bird” by Robert Frost uses birds as their subject of comparison; however, these sonnets contains different hidden meanings by the content, the way the two poets present the sonnets, and the way the narrator observe the birds. Hopkins is a Jesuits, as we take his family background into account, we can argue that “ The Windhover” is a sonnet that describes Jesus by using the characteristics of the windhover, and the way the narrator sees the windhover. The Oven bird” on the other hand, is a sonnet that describes the sounds made by the oven bird, which leads to the change in seasons and the question of life, death. The content of “ The Windhover” contains imagery about the windhover that seems comparable to the characteristics of Jesus. The observer describes the bird as “ dauphin”, the [1] heir to French throne, which is the same as Jesus Christ who is the only son of God.

Hopkins describes the way the windhover flies and controls the wind, which is similar to a nobleman rides steadily on a horse and expressing a sense of holiness and mightiness. Whereas, the windhover swoops down from the sky, it is described as a plowman instead of the nobleman that symbolize for Jesus; when Jesus was in the heaven, he is almighty God, after God sent Jesus to the earth, he becomes a ordinary man who was born in a manger. When the bird swoops down from the sky, it produces and imagery of embers breaking apart and sparkles; and it is also like ploughs the field and the rich soil appears. All the wonderful things occur when the bird descends. As the bird gradually approaches the surface, it is like fire that fall down

which there is an [2]analogy to windhover. The phoenix dies by fire and it reborn.

After Jesus died on the cross, [3]one the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear to ensure he is dead. Christ gashed and rise from the dead. Hopkins uses the bird to praise Jesus Christ and describe the wonderfulness of Jesus comes down to the earth for salvation which is full of hope and Hopkins expresses his positive viewpoints. Frost uses the content of " The Oven Bird" to discuss a simple question in life.

When a man has everything going according to plan, things will one day go downhill after certain time and probably reaches the death as a result. The oven bird is also called the [4]teacher bird because the sound of the bird sounds like " teacher, teacher. " It appears in the mid-summer, August which is prior to fall. In the Octave, the oven bird sings in the forest, his voices " makes the solid tree trunks sound again", which means that the summer is here. " The early petal-fall is past" means that the spring is over. Spring also symbolize of birth of a man.

The mid-summer symbolizes a middle aged man. The leaves and flowers are old and withered in the mid-summer. Mid-summer symbolizes a turning point of an individual's life. [5]" When the pear and cherry bloom went down in showers " On sunny days a moment overcast" has the imagery of the blooms covers the sun like clouds on a sunny day.

The sun has a positive meaning which is covered by full of the blooms. This makes the appearance of the oven bird a start of the sadness, whereas the Octave in " The Windhover", only has the imagery of the windhover flies

gloriously and majestically which emphasizes the pre-existing of Jesus in the heaven and how almighty he is. In the sestet of “ The Oven Bird”, “ the fall we name the fall” has an inner meaning of the fall. [6]The fall of man is when Adam and Eve eat the fruit of the forbidden tree; Adam is the one who brings death to the world. “ Is what to make of a diminished thing”, Frost leaves a question at the end of the sonnet. The oven bird stops singing when the fall arrives, the oven bird also stops teaching.

Therefore, we will never know the real answer of the question. However, in the sestet of “ The Windhover”, Hopkins solves the question; Jesus descends to the earth to save us. The rhymes, the words using and the separation of the octave and the sestet help Hopkins to emphasize the symbolism of Jesus. Hopkins uses regularly rhymes to make the sonnet has a pattern to read with yet he uses [7]many words that start with the same letter and arrange them one by one which make the readers to make a little pause, then continue, “ morning morning’s minion”, “-dom of daylight’s dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon”, “ gash gold-vermillion”.

The octave and the sestet are two different units of thoughts. In the octave, Hopkins describes how the bird flies, the imagery is soft and calm, whereas in the sestet, the bird swoops down to the earth, and the imagery becomes more harsh and active. On the other hand, Frost does not use the regular pattern of the rhyming system in “ The Oven Bird” which makes the sonnet more complicated and to emphasize the simple question in life, “ Is what to make of a diminished thing” in fact is not as easy as humans tend to think. Compare to “ The Windhover”, Frost also separates the sonnet into octave and sestet. However, the narrator makes the imagery in “ The Oven Bird”

gets bleak and sad along the sonnet by the change in seasons, from summer to fall, and the oven bird stops singing, stops teaching where as the imagery in “ The Windhover” stays at the same attitude throughout the entire sonnet; the bird is both glory in the sky and on the earth, just like Jesus. The two sonnets has different hidden meaning is also affected by the techniques that was used in the sonnets.

In “ The Windhover”, the narrator visually sees the bird where as in “ The Oven Bird”, the narrator only hears the bird. Jesus Christ comes to the world is a true statement according to Hopkins’ belief; therefore, he describes the windhover visually. In addition, by the shape and physique the windhover is and the way the windhover flies is where the significance of the bird is. However, in “ The Oven Bird”, the narrator does not give the readers an answer to the question of what make the diminished thing. The narrator is only hearing the sound of the oven bird, not really seeing it; the answer to the question is undiscovered because when one hears something but not visually proving it, it may not be real.

Therefore, the answer to the question is sealed with the cease of the sound of the oven bird. In addition, the oven bird is significant with its voice. When the “ teacher, teacher” sound stops, the oven bird vanishes along with it. Sonnets, “ The Windhover” and “ The Oven Bird” are both about the observations of the birds and have the same separation of units of thoughts; however, by the differences of rhymes using and content, the different backgrounds of the poets, and the differences of how the narrators observe the birds makes these two sonnets different than each other.

“ The Windhover” is about glorious Jesus descents to the earth from the sky to create the wonderful things on the earth. “ The Oven Bird” is about a simple question in life; and it is simple enough to have an answer with no answer.